

BENNET, John (editor - publisher) - Vagabond Anthology  
John Bennet, P.O. Box 879, Ellensburg, Washington 98926.

In Bennet's anthology, The Vagabond, the Bukowski influence is indisputable. Bennet, himself, in fact, the publisher-editor of Vagabond, is a poet who Charles Bukowski has a strong personal influence on. Fox's History of American Poetry sums it up: " . .

The big influence on America for better or worse - during the whole period of the 1960's and 70's was Charles Bukowski. . . The Beat Revolution heavily tipped poetry techniques in favor of diction and subject populism (Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso, Ferlinghetti) and Bukowski took it that one final step into the streets so that it almost became anti-poetry. . ."

Bennet, in his Foreword to the anthology sums it up: "You strike that chord that lies deep inside all of us and you say something that true and always has been true and always will be true and is not and cannot be compromised and rationalized and frittered away, can only be lost from sight - you say it and do it and it is a poem, no matter what the form. . . We think that poetry is content not form, form being incidental, the Cadillac in which the diplomat rides. We think poetry is potent, spiritual and mysterious. It is not a play thing. It is as scarce and illusive as it has always been. Its only reward is in its discovery and you discover it thru clear vision, a flash of insight in the vast black mystery of your very brief existence."

Fox's History points out that the early Bukowski is more surrealist than tough guy, stylistically more Dadaistic, closer to André Breton than Ginsberg or Kerouac - as in "Thermometer", relative early Bukowski from Poems Written Before Jumping Out of an 8 Story Window. There's a poem, in fact by Ira Herman, in The Vagabond Anthology which seems to sum up what a lot of people think Bukowski is.

Although there's still a lot of the tough guy stance in Bennet's anthology there's also the existentialist. In general, that in the existential philosophy which attempts to codify the



irrational aspects of man's nature, to objectify non-being or nothingness and see it as a universal source of fear, to distrust concepts and to emphasize experimental concreteness. In many of the poems in Vagabond Anthology the poet's grapple with the sense man has meaninglessness in the outer world; the meaninglessness which produces discomfort, anxiety, loneliness in the face of man's limitations - and a desire to invest meaning by acting upon the world, although efforts to act in a meaningless "absurd" world lead to anguish - greater loneliness and despair. This despair-ridden existentialism is vividly depicted in the poem "Third Quarter" by D. A. Levy.

The anthology is a compilation of numerous poets-Levy, Steve Richmond with his Gakaku "the high priest of poetic decadent-magic") describing demons that turn into chickens and then into housewives, Doug Blazek, Kent Taylor, T.R.Kryss, Lyn Lifshin and the "two Eves", Connie Fox ("French Decadent, Nowist, sister of Rimbaud and Baudelaire"), etc. It's a fine anthology, one of the best of contemporary poetry around.

MICHAEL HOFFMAN FRANZ